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I. F. Stone on *Apologizing to Iran*

This is a good time to recall the Pueblo affair in 1968. Lyndon Johnson, abrasive though he was, kept his cool for 11 months and then apologized to North Korea in order to free the crew of that naval intelligence vessel. It had been seized in North Korean waters and Johnson had to admit the violation to get the hostage crewmen back safely. (North Korea kept the ship.) The alternative, as then urged by some of our hawks during a year of uproar, was to forget about the hostages and restore respect for the American Godfather by bombing North Korea—in a once-famous U.S. Air Force general's felicitous phrase—"back to the Stone Age."

A similar demand for an "apology" is playing a part in the Iranian hostage negotiations; and the country has yet to get the full story or grasp the full implications. When the President was asked at his press conference on February 13, whether he would be willing to apologize for our restoration of the Shah in 1953, he brushed the question aside as "ancient history."

But it is not ancient history for the Iranians, and it may not be ancient history for us either. In 1953, the Shah fled without abdicating and was later put back on the throne by the CIA. This time, too, the Shah has fled without abdicating, and his energetic twin sister has indicated that the family still hopes that Iran may be restored to the Pahlavis, perhaps with a younger member of the dynasty on the Peacock Throne.

This is what Iranians fear, and this is what many U.S. banks and big businesses may desire. For that would mean the resumption of contracts and relationships worth, literally, billions of dollars to them. Should Khomeini die, there may be chaos or civil war, and the possibility of intervention to restore the monarchy and what might be called picturesquely, but not too inaccurately, the Chase Manhattan connection.

What Iran is asking is a public pledge that we will not attempt a repeat performance. Mr. Carter's vague expression of regret two days later about "past misunderstandings" with Iran is not enough to dispel the fears generated by the unleashing of the CIA and the mobilization of U.S. power in the Persian Gulf.

Such a pledge of nonintervention would clear the way for the release of the hostages. It would also assure the American public that our government would keep hands off Iran, give the new Bani-Sadr regime a chance, and not utilize the CIA and "rapid deployment forces" in what could be an intervention far more inflammatory than Vietnam. The danger, put simply, is that we may try to do in Iran exactly what the Russians have done in

Afghanistan—violate international law to impose a puppet regime on an unwilling people.

The new President of Iran, Bani-Sadr, striving desperately to get the American hostages out of the hands of the militants, has already made his own apology to the United States, though little notice has been taken of it. In an interview with Greek television (*Washington Star*, February 18), he admitted that the seizure of the U.S. Embassy was "from the humanitarian point of view deplorable" and from the legal point of view "violated the international rules." He added, however, that it was "not our side" which began the violation of international norms in Iran and that "we now see the consequences" of such lawlessness.

Since the dirty tricks division of the CIA is our institutional device for violating international law, and since we are preparing to "unleash" it, the question of what happened in 1953 is no longer "ancient history" but renewed policy. We are indeed on the verge of applying it in El Salvador and perhaps also Guatemala.

The CIA jargon for such operations is "destabilization." There could be no better word for what a new series of big or little Vietnams would do to our economy. That's all our ailing dollar needs.